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Thornton Fractional District 215
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**Thornton Fractional District 215 Board of Education Votes to Dissolve TF South “Rebels”
Nickname/Team Name**

Lansing, IL- At their August 25, 2020 regular monthly meeting, the Thornton Fractional District 215 Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt a resolution to dissolve the Thornton Fractional High School nickname “Rebels.” The resolution states, “Thornton Fractional Township High School District 215 is committed to an overall culture of equity with the guiding principle of learning environments that are welcoming, positive and inclusive, where all students and stakeholders feel a sense of belonging and purpose in school.” It goes on to acknowledge that the TF South nickname “Rebels” originated from a reference to the Confederacy, and notes that “imagery associated with the Confederacy has racist connotations.”

The District 215 Board of Education voted at their June regular meeting to survey TF South students on whether they “support changing the school nickname to something other than ‘Rebels.’” The survey question sent to students included an introductory message from Principal Jake Gourley, who noted that it is a time in our nation when attention is being called to brand names and team names that “have historically racist origins or connotations.” Gourley shared that when TF South was founded in 1958, the pun was that the “South” had seceded from the “North” campus, and the imagery adopted by the new Thornton Fractional South campus was that of a Confederate soldier, the Confederate battle flag, and the nickname “Rebels.” It was also noted by Gourley that the Confederate flag was removed in the mid-1990s and the Confederate soldier mascot was eliminated by the mid-2000s. The survey was sent to all active TF South students, which included the sophomore, junior, and senior classes of 2020-21, and each student received an individualized link to respond to ensure accurate results. Of the students surveyed, 325 students responded, or approximately 25%; and of those who responded, 69.5% supported changing the name to something other than “Rebels.”

When asked why the Board of Education decided to act on this issue, board member Richard Dust stated, “With everything happening in our country at the present time it definitely seemed to me the time was right to consider this question. If not now, when?” The issue of dropping the nickname was initially raised in 2017 when a TF South student, Mia Pettigrew, wrote an essay

for her Government class arguing that the name “Rebels” should be eliminated, and then sent the essay to Dr. Creg Williams, who was the superintendent at that time.

At the July 25, 2020 Board of Education meeting, Vice-President LeeAnn Revis shared that eliciting student participation in the decision-making process was an “equity-informed decision” because it allowed the students to take ownership of the process rather than have the board make the decision without any input from the students. Last month, the Board of Education adopted an Equity Plan of Action and a resolution on racial justice and voted to establish an Equity Student Leadership Club as part of ongoing equity initiatives in the district. Documents and further information detailing the equity initiatives found above can be found on the District 215 website at <https://www.tfd215.org/aboutus/commitment-to-equity/>.

Dr. Sophia Jones-Redmond, superintendent of District 215, said that a conversation regarding the process for adopting a new nickname for TF South will most likely begin at the Board of Education’s September Committee of the Whole meeting.

About Thornton Fractional High School District 215: District 215 serves the students of Burnham, Calumet City, Lansing, and Lynwood at Thornton Fractional North High School, Thornton Fractional South High School, Thornton Fractional Center for Academics and Technology, and Thornton Fractional Center for Alternative Learning. The mission of District 215 is to provide diverse learning opportunities that inspire all students to become life-long learners who contribute to their community.

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